

# PEOPLE & THINGS

**T**HERE are, of course, many perspectives in national life; but at the end of many of them there now squats the unpredictable monster: commercial television.

Few of us over here know commercial television at first hand. I was the more interested, therefore, to meet Mr. Turner Catledge, the Editor of the "New York Times," when he passed through London last week.

The "New York Times" is a big newspaper. Its news-room, for instance, runs the whole width of a block—all of a hundred yards—and the Assistant Managing Editor was once given binoculars to pick out his men. But Mr. Catledge, a square-built, compact man in his early fifties, does not make heavy weather of his responsibilities; and, as far as commercial television is concerned, he does not need to.

## The Prestige of Print

**P**EOPLE like, he told me, to read about what they have seen on the screen. In the case of an isolated political incident, they like to have it put into perspective. When television has shown them a day-long and largely uneventful debate—at the United Nations, let us say, or a quiet session at the McCarthy hearings—they like to have the proceedings picked over by an expert. And even after a prize-fight or a ball-game, where the viewer sees more than the man at the ringside—even then, Mr. Catledge told me, the newspapers of the United States rather gain than lose by the preliminary coverage of the television screen.

As a convinced and informed friend of this country, Mr. Catledge expects nothing but good of our Independent Television Authority, and when I told him of its chairman's work on Leonardo da Vinci and Piero della Francesca he showed the most cordial interest.

I even went so far as to infer that the millionaire foundations of the United States, with their sponsored versions of "Hamlet" and "King Lear," would soon be made to look rather common. I did not stress the fact that Sir Kenneth Clark's most recent publication bears the disquieting title of "The Naked and the Nude."

## A Philatelist's Nightmare

**T**HERE are certain persons—Sir Harold Nicolson is one who leaps to mind—whose resistance to philately is absolute. I am not quite as brave as they. If I am told that a stamp which was once sold for a penny is now worth five hundred pounds, my impatience is mixed with awe.

It was, in fact, with a tremor of indignation that I heard of the ingenuities of Monsieur Jean de

## By ATTICUS

Sperati. For Monsieur de Sperati has contrived to reproduce the stamps of the past with such skill that even the expert can be deceived at a first glance.

So far from wishing to deceive the great Parisian dealers, Monsieur de Sperati despatched agents provocateurs, whose mission was to prove that his reproductions were, in fact, reproductions.

"Surely," they said, as they proffered a replica of the 1913



Australian 2s kangaroo, "Surely this must be worthless?" But the dealers begged to buy. Other rarities—the 1880 2s. brown (Great Britain), for instance, and the French 1853 1 fr. carmine—met with the same welcome. Magistrates and customs officials were delighted to be taken in; and only in the sage councils of the British Philatelic Association was the danger accurately assessed. For although Monsieur de Sperati sold his replicas as replicas, his customers might not all be so scrupulous.

## The Sorcerer's Apprentice

**W**HEN Monsieur de Sperati announced that he was retiring on account of failing eyesight, there was general relief. A second announcement, however, spoke of the search for an apprentice who could be trained to the craft; and at this the B.P.A. negotiated with Monsieur de Sperati and eventually acquired his complete stock and equipment.

The Association is to publish a complete account of the reproductions in an edition of 500 numbered copies. As these are to be sold to members only, at £20 apiece, I feel that philatelists may like to see two examples of Monsieur de Sperati's skill: of the stamps reproduced above, those to the left are genuine, and those to the right are Sperati reproductions. The issues in question are the Montserrat 1884 4d. blue and the Sierra Leone 1859 6d.

## H2O to K2

**M**OST of us think of the great mountaineers as Byronic heroes. Only above 25,000 feet, as it seems to us, can they overthrow their private demons and wrest from their difficult natures the elements of content.

Perhaps it was always nonsense. It is certainly nonsense now, and nobody could prove it more conclusively than Signor Desio, whose conquest of K2 is one of the most brilliant things of its kind. For Signor Desio, as I learn from the Royal Geographical Society is

pre-eminent among the new race of scientific explorers. As Director of the Geological Institute at the University of Milan he extends his interest impartially to all areas, whether flat or upstanding, of the earth's surface. He is a master-technician whose early reputation was made in conditions remote from those in which he has now become world-famous. Nothing, after all, could be farther from the problems of the Himalayas than the studies in the water-resources of the Libyan desert which first made Signor Desio's name; but his successful attempt on K2 is a triumphant example of what can be achieved by the modern combination of top-class professional planning and a supreme gift for physical adventure.

## A Good Tuck-in

**I** AM delighted to hear that this year's British Food Fair (to be held at Olympia from September 7 to 18) will be notable for the massive contribution of countries from behind the Iron Curtain. No longer shall we have to turn to the great Russian novelists for our notion of Siberian salmon and Crimean pink champagne; these delicacies, together with the Zealand oyster and the Strasbourg goose, will be at hand and may be sampled by all. The Russian stand will, in fact, be the largest at the fair—though none too large, I imagine, for the number of those who will wish to pursue their researches there.

## A Loading Problem

**I**N most discussions of the great helicopter controversy it is assumed that the noise-factor is constant. Deafened legislators and martyred hospital-patients are, in fact, essential to all serious argument on the subject.

I learn, however, from Wing-Commander Reginald Brie, the head of British European Airways' Helicopter Experimental Unit at Gatwick, that there is no serious technical obstacle to the use of silencers on helicopters. It is entirely on grounds of weight that the existing types do not include one; to fit a silencer would reduce the passenger-load, it seems, by five stones avoirdupois, thus making it necessary either to increase the fare or to make provision for a regular traffic in dwarfs.

## A Veteran Master

**C**ROQUET is the most loyal of games. At what else, after all, can an octogenarian count on defeating a roaring boy? Wimbledon, Lord's and the White City are faithless arenas. But, given mallet, hoop, and the command of the calendar, Goethe in his last years could have outplayed Pindar's wrestlers; and Mozart, the master of the billiards-table, would have found in croquet the supreme distraction of his momentary leisure.

These points have never, to my knowledge, been made in print. The discreet, fastidious, and perfectly democratic virtues of croquet await their champion; but meanwhile Mr. Maurice Reckitt's "Croquet To-Day," which came out not today but last Thursday, will do very well. To two sovereign aspects of croquet—its appeal to all ages, and the intricacies of its private language—it does particular justice: so much so, in fact, that it might be subtitled, and with no punning intent, "De Senectute: or The Art of Pegging Out."